

The EMBER RIDGE GAZETTE



Where There's Smoke, There's a Story

ALL THE NEWS THAT'S FIT TO IGNITE

OCTOBER 2026

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: MAYA ALVAREZ



WELCOME TO STATION 12

Guest Editorial by Sheila Kell

Welcome to the inaugural issue of *The Ember Ridge Gazette*!

The firefighters at Station 12 have plenty of stories to tell, and I'm willing to bet they'd rather keep a few secrets.

Unfortunately for them, investigative journalist Maya Alvarez has decided Ember Ridge needs its own newspaper. And if you've met Maya, you know she isn't easily discouraged when someone tells her something is none of her business.

Each issue will take you behind the scenes of my Fireline Hearts series, beginning with Ignite My Heart. You'll catch up with familiar characters, meet new faces, discover what's happening around Station 12, and occasionally learn something the firefighters would rather you didn't know.

Maya is our fictional editor-in-chief, and I'll help her gather the stories. Together, we'll bring you interviews, firehouse gossip, community happenings, and exclusive glimpses into the lives of the characters you've come to love.



Expect old stuff, new stuff, and previously secret stuff. You might even hear from a certain opinionated cat.

Have a question for the crew? Want to know what happened to a favorite couple after their book ended?

Send a letter to the editor. We might feature your question in an upcoming issue!

Now, grab your coffee, find a comfortable chair, and enjoy your visit to Ember Ridge.

Just don't park in front of the fire station.

Editor-in-Chief: Maya Alvarez

Guest Writer: Sheila Kell

Publisher: Cunningham Publishing

Letters to the Editor: sheila@sheilakell.com

Love Stories Wrapped in Danger

STATION 12 TRIVIA

How Well Do You Know the Crew?

QUESTION:

What is Captain Gabriel Stone's nickname?

ANSWER:

Bear!

And if you've met him, you probably understand why.



HEARD AROUND EMBER RIDGE

Love Is in the Air... or Is That Smoke?

Rumor has it that certain members of Station 12 would prefer their romantic lives remain off the record.

Unfortunately for them, this newspaper has an investigative journalist for an editor.

Stay tuned. Maya has questions.



★ QUOTE OF THE ISSUE ★

"Heroes don't always wear capes. Sometimes they wear turnout gear."

A little reminder that the men and women of Station 12 run toward danger when everyone else is running away.





THE WOMAN BEHIND THE DANGER



Maya Alvarez: Welcome to The Ember Ridge Gazette, Sheila. Before we get started, I have one question. Why firefighters?

Sheila Kell: There's something irresistible about people who run toward danger when everyone else is running away. Firefighters are brave, loyal, and protective, but they're also human. They have fears, flaws, and hearts that don't always cooperate with their plans. Those are the characters I love writing.

Maya: You've already put Liam and me through quite a bit in *Ignite My Heart*. Should the rest of Station 12 be worried?

Sheila: Absolutely. Although I wouldn't tell them that directly. I still need them to cooperate when I'm writing their stories.

Maya: What makes *Fireline Hearts* different from your other romantic suspense series?

Sheila: The firehouse family. Station 12 isn't just a workplace. These firefighters share danger, laughter, loss, and the kind of loyalty that makes them family.

And outside the station, Ember Ridge has its own personality, with people who know everybody's business whether they admit it or not.

Maya: Speaking of everybody's business, can readers expect to see familiar faces throughout the series?

Sheila: Definitely. Just because a couple gets their happily ever after doesn't mean they disappear. Readers will see them again, sometimes helping their friends, sometimes getting into trouble, and occasionally offering advice nobody asked for.

Maya: Last question. Do you enjoy making your characters miserable before giving them their happy endings?

Sheila: I prefer to call it character development.

Maya: Somehow, I knew you'd say that.

Interview conducted for *The Ember Ridge Gazette*. Maya Alvarez reserves the right to investigate any suspicious answers.



BEHIND THE STORY

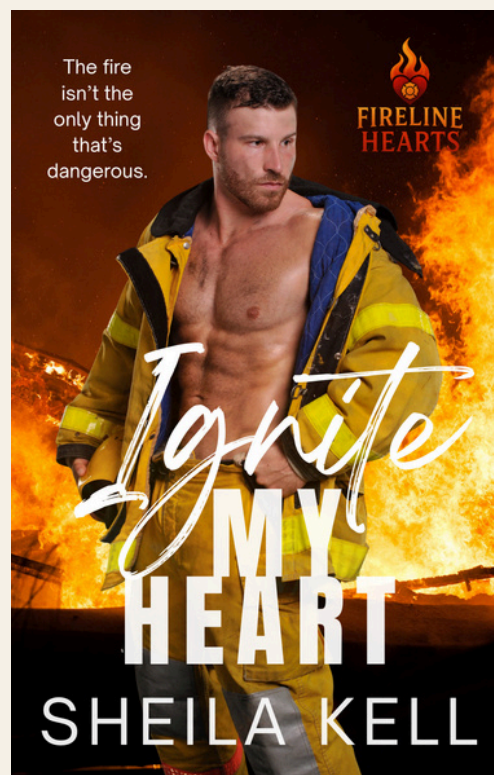
Behind the Story: *Ignite My Heart*

A firefighter who runs toward danger. An investigative journalist who refuses to back down.

When Liam Carter and Maya Alvarez's worlds collide, sparks fly, secrets surface, and staying alive becomes as complicated as falling in love.

Ignite My Heart launches the *Fireline Hearts* series, introducing readers to Station 12, the close-knit crew, and a town where love can be every bit as dangerous as fire.

One firehouse. One unforgettable romance.



FROM THE *Firehouse* FLOOR

WHERE THE ALARMS RING, THE COFFEE BREWS, AND THE CREW BECOMES FAMILY.

MEET THE CREW

Firefighter Liam Carter

Every firehouse has a firefighter who can be counted on when things get dangerous. At Station 12, Liam Carter is one of those men.

Dependable under pressure and fiercely protective of the people he cares about, Liam doesn't hesitate when someone needs help. Of course, that protective streak has occasionally put him at odds with a certain investigative journalist who doesn't appreciate being told to stay out of danger.

When he's not answering emergency calls, Liam can usually be found spending time with his Station 12 family or trying to convince Maya Alvarez that not every suspicious situation requires her personal investigation.

So far, his success rate on that last assignment is questionable.

Gazette observation: Liam Carter can handle a burning building. Convincing Maya Alvarez to mind her own business? That's an entirely different emergency.

FIREHOUSE NEWS & CREW UPDATES

The Great Coffee Debate

Tensions briefly rose at Station 12 this week when someone suggested switching to decaf.

"That's not coffee. That's disappointment in a cup," firefighter Cal "Bluefin" Bennett reportedly declared.

Captain Stone declined to comment, although witnesses claim he immediately checked the coffee supply.

Chief Lawson has assured the Gazette that the department remains fully operational.

An Unofficial Station 12 Competition

Firefighter Jake "Pretty Boy" Thorne insists he holds the station record for getting into his turnout gear.

Valerie "Specs" Keller has requested an independent timekeeper.

"Preferably someone who knows the difference between fast and properly dressed," she said.

No official competition has been scheduled. Yet.

FIREFIGHTER LINGO

Turnout Gear: The protective clothing firefighters wear when responding to emergencies, including their coat, pants, boots, helmet, and gloves. Also called bunker gear.

Did You Know? Firefighters have to learn how to put on their protective equipment quickly, but speed never takes priority over making sure everything is properly secured. When the alarm sounds, every second matters, and so does every piece of gear.



Straight from the Smoke & Spoon

Well, hello there, sugar!

If you haven't stopped by the Smoke & Spoon yet, you're missing out on good food, strong coffee, and some of the most interesting conversations in Ember Ridge.

Now, I don't gossip. I just listen when people talk loud enough for the whole diner to hear.

Take the firefighters from Station 12. They come in hungry, leave full, and somehow manage to turn an ordinary breakfast into a competition. I've learned not to ask who's winning. It only encourages them.

And don't get me started on the romances brewing around here. I've seen enough meaningful glances across my counter to know when somebody's falling hard. Usually before they figure it out themselves.

Of course, I wouldn't dream of naming names.

Not in the first issue, anyway.

So pull up a chair, order something delicious, and stay awhile. There's always room for one more at the Smoke & Spoon.

Until next time, keep your coffee hot and your secrets quiet.

Love, *Jonetta*



Ember Ridge Prepares for Fall Festival

Autumn has arrived in Ember Ridge, and preparations are underway for the town's annual Fall Festival.

Residents can look forward to homemade treats, local crafts, games, and a friendly pumpkin-carving competition.

Station 12 firefighters are expected to attend, though



Life According to a Very Important Cat

First, I'd like to file a formal complaint.
Jonetta got to go first.

I'm Cardio. Thirteen pounds of magnificent tortoiseshell feline, expert napper, and the only member of this household with any common sense.

My human, Julia, is a trauma nurse. Very intelligent woman. Excellent at saving lives. Terrible at understanding that an empty spot in my food bowl constitutes an emergency.

Then there's Bear.

Big man. Deep voice. Thinks he's in charge.

Adorable, really.

I've spent considerable time training him. He now understands that my favorite chair belongs to me, regardless of who purchased it. We're still working on the proper distribution of treats.

And Mason? That boy has potential. He understands the importance of snacks, although someone needs to explain that chicken nuggets are not an acceptable substitute for proper feline cuisine.

I'll be using this column to discuss important matters, including the criminal shortage of treats, unauthorized furniture occupation, and why humans insist on moving sleeping cats.

Until next time, remember:

If the cat is comfortable, nobody moves.

Cardio

P.S. Jonetta, I'm watching you.



organizers have reportedly asked them to leave the competitive spirit at the firehouse.

The Smoke & Spoon will be serving seasonal favorites, and Jonetta promises nobody will leave hungry.

Festival reminder: Bring your family, your appetite, and your best pumpkin!



One More Promise

Life After the Flames: Liam & Maya

An exclusive Fireline Hearts bonus scene

Liam Carter's POV

Liam Carter had faced collapsing buildings, exploding gas lines, and an arsonist who'd made it his personal mission to destroy everything Liam cared about.

None of that had prepared him for a small velvet box.

He checked his pocket for the fourth time. Still there.

"You keep doing that, you're going to wear a hole in those pants."

Liam turned.

Jonetta stood in the back doorway of the Smoke & Spoon, wiping her hands on her apron. Her eyes dropped to his pocket. "Relax, sugar. She's going to say yes."

"You don't know that."

Jonetta gave him a look usually reserved for customers who complained about her cooking.

"I've watched that girl look at you when she thinks nobody's paying attention. Trust me."

Liam glanced around the backyard. The same string lights hung overhead, casting a warm glow across the tables. A small fire crackled in the stone pit. Jonetta had arranged dinner for two beneath the old oak tree, complete with candles and a vase of flowers.

Nothing extravagant. Just quiet. Comfortable. The kind of evening Maya rarely allowed herself.

"Thanks for doing this," he said.

Jonetta's expression softened. "Honey, after everything you two have been through, I'm happy to help."

Then she pointed a finger at his chest. "But if you change your mind, I'm keeping the dessert."

"I'm not changing my mind."

"Good. Because I made chocolate cake."

She disappeared inside before he could respond.

Liam exhaled.

He'd spent three weeks planning this evening.

Three weeks of hiding a ring, dodging questions, and listening to advice he hadn't requested.

Bear had told him to keep it simple.

Specs had suggested a checklist.

Pretty Boy had offered to arrange fireworks.

Liam had immediately vetoed that idea.

Echo had somehow discovered the ring before he'd even picked it up from the jeweler.

And Chief Lawson had simply looked at him across the apparatus bay and said, "About time."

Everyone seemed certain this would go well.

Everyone except Liam.

He wasn't afraid Maya didn't love him. He knew she did. But marriage was different. It was a lifetime of promises, and Liam knew better than most how quickly life could change.

The back door opened again.

"Okay," Maya said, stepping outside. "What's going on?"

His heart gave one hard thump.

She wore dark jeans and a soft blue blouse, her hair falling loose around her shoulders. She stopped when she saw the table.

Her gaze traveled from the candles to the flowers, then to him. "Liam?"

"Hey."

"Hey?" She raised an eyebrow. "That's what you've got?"

He smiled despite himself. "You look beautiful."

"Thank you. Now, why does Jonetta keep grinning at me like she knows something I don't?"

"Maybe she's happy to see you."

"Jonetta threatened to ban me from the kitchen when I asked what she was making."

"Sounds normal."

"And you told me to leave my laptop at home."

"Also normal."

"Liam."

He stepped closer and took her hand.

"Can you stop investigating for one evening?"

Continued on Page 6 →



She studied him. "That depends. Are you hiding something?"

"Yes."

Her eyebrows shot up.

He laughed. "Come have dinner."

Maya finished the salad before she started asking questions again. "Is it your birthday?"

"No."

"Did you get promoted?"

"No."

"Did you break something of mine?"

"Maya."

"I'm narrowing down the possibilities."

Liam reached across the table and took her hand.

"You're impossible."

"You knew that when you met me."

"I did."

"And yet you kept coming back."

"Best decision I ever made."

That quieted her.

For a moment, she simply looked at him.

The fire popped softly nearby. Beyond the fence, Ember Ridge carried on with its evening, cars passing, someone laughing down the street, the distant sound of a dog barking. Ordinary sounds.

There had been a time when Liam wasn't certain they'd get to have ordinary evenings together.

He'd watched flames consume buildings. He'd felt his own blood soaking through his shirt. He'd held Maya close while danger circled them, knowing there were things he couldn't control no matter how desperately he wanted to.

And somehow, they'd made it here. Back to this yard. Back to each other.

"Maya," he said.

Something in his voice made her straighten. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing."

"Then why do you look like you're about to deliver bad news?"

"Because I'm nervous."

She blinked. "You?"

"Believe it or not."

"Liam, you ran into a burning building with less hesitation than you've shown ordering dessert tonight."

"That's different."

"How?"

"With a fire, I know what I'm doing."

Her expression softened.

She gave a small laugh. "You haven't exactly succeeded."

"No. And somewhere along the way, I figured out I was going about it all wrong."

He brushed his thumb across her knuckles. "You don't need somebody to tell you what you can and can't do. You need somebody who believes in you. Somebody who stands beside you, even when he's scared out of his mind."

Her eyes glistened. "Liam..."

"I used to think protecting someone meant keeping them away from danger. You taught me that sometimes it means trusting them to face it." He swallowed. "And you taught me something else."

"What?"

"That coming home matters just as much as going out there and doing the job."

Maya pressed her lips together.

He could see the emotion gathering in her eyes, and it nearly undid him.

"I love the way you fight for people who can't fight for themselves. I love that you ask questions nobody wants to answer. I even love that you steal the last cup of coffee and leave the pot empty."

A tear slipped down her cheek.

She laughed. "I do not."

"You absolutely do."

"Liam."

"I love you, Maya. All of you. The stubborn parts, the brave parts, even the parts that drive me crazy."

He released one of her hands and reached into his pocket. Her gaze dropped. Then widened.

For the first time since he'd known her, Maya Alvarez appeared to have run out of questions.

Liam lowered himself onto one knee.

"Maya Alvarez, I can't promise there won't be hard days. I can't promise I'll always know the right thing to say. But I can promise I'll stand beside you through every one of them."

He opened the velvet box.

Inside, the diamond caught the light from the fire.

"I want the ordinary mornings. The late-night arguments about whose turn it is to make coffee. The holidays, the laughter, the adventures, and whatever else life throws at us." His voice roughened. "I want to grow old with you."

Maya covered her mouth.

"Will you marry me?"

Continued on Page 7 →



For one terrible second, she didn't answer. Then she dropped to her knees before him. "Yes."

He stared. "Yes?"

She laughed through her tears. "Yes, Liam Carter. I'll marry you."

Relief hit him so hard he nearly fell backward. Instead, he caught her around the waist and pulled her into his arms.

She kissed him. Not a polite, celebratory kiss. The kind that made him forget there was a ring in his hand and an entire town somewhere beyond the fence.

When they finally separated, Maya rested her forehead against his. "You scared me," she whispered.

"Me?"

"You were acting so strange. I thought something was wrong."

"Something was wrong. I was trying to propose to the most suspicious woman in Ember Ridge."

She laughed. "Occupational hazard."

He slipped the ring onto her finger. It fit. Thank God.

Maya held up her hand, watching the diamond sparkle.

"It's beautiful."

"You're beautiful."

"You're getting sentimental, Carter."

"Don't tell the crew."

"Oh, I'm telling everybody."

He groaned.

She grinned.

And there she was. His Maya.

The woman who could walk into a room full of dangerous men and demand answers. The woman who refused to back down when the truth mattered. The woman who'd somehow convinced him that a future didn't have to be something you feared losing.

It could be something you built.

Together.

A loud sniff came from the diner doorway.

They turned.

Jonetta stood there with a dish towel pressed to her face.

"I told you she'd say yes."

Maya burst out laughing.

"Jonetta!"

"What? You think I was going to miss this?"

Liam shook his head. "You promised not to interrupt."

"And I didn't. I waited until she said yes."

"How long have you been standing there?" Maya asked.

Jonetta lowered the towel. "Long enough to know that boy loves you something fierce."

Maya leaned into Liam.

He wrapped an arm around her shoulders.

Jonetta smiled. "Now, if you two are finished making me cry, your chocolate cake is getting cold."

Liam frowned. "Isn't chocolate cake supposed to be cold?"

"Not the way I make it."

She disappeared inside.

Maya looked up at him.

"So."

"So?"

"We're getting married."

His chest tightened. "Yeah. We are."

She smiled. "Does this mean I finally get a key to your place?"

Liam stared at her. "You already have a key."

"I know. I just wanted to see your face."

He laughed and kissed her again.

Behind them, the fire burned steadily, its warmth spreading through the cool evening air.

The last time they'd sat here together, Liam had been grateful simply to be alive, to have Maya beside him, and to know they'd survived what should have torn them apart.

Tonight, he wanted more. A lifetime more.

And when Maya slipped her hand into his, the new ring cool against his fingers, Liam knew he'd found something worth every risk he'd ever taken.

Not another rescue.

Not another battle.

A future.

With her.

THE END.



November brings more secrets, surprises, and firehouse shenanigans to Ember Ridge!

Meet Captain Gabriel "Bear" Stone, catch up on the latest Station 12 antics, and find out what Jonetta and Cardio have to say about life around town.

Same town. More sparks. More stories.